

PREPARATION GUIDE

FOR

WRITTEN TESTS

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GENERAL INFORMATION ON WRITTEN TESTS

Two types of questions are often used in written tests: (1) multiple-choice questions and (2) essay questions. Written tests may be all multiple-choice questions, all essay questions or a combination of these. For multiple-choice questions, candidates are given a number of answers to choose from for each question and must record the answer they select for the questions on a “fill-in-the-bubble” answer sheet. For written exercises, candidates must write out their answers in a special answer booklet. Additional information on multiple-choice questions and written exercises is provided in the pages that follow.

Written tests are designed to test the knowledge, skills and abilities that are important for success in a job. Such tests are not intended to test whether candidates can learn job related knowledge quickly. For this reason, test questions are not developed from specific reading materials, and we do not provide candidates with specific information about what to study in order to prepare for written tests. However, there are several things candidates can do to put themselves at ease when faced with a written test.

(1) Read the job announcement carefully. Job announcements normally include a description of the purpose of the job class and a list of the knowledge, skills and abilities that are used in the job class. Use this to determine the subject areas that are likely to be represented in the written test.

(2) Read the job specification for the job class. (This is available on DAS web site). Job specifications include a list of the duties performed by employees in a job class. This may also be useful in suggesting areas that are likely to be represented in the written test.

(3) You may also want to visit your local library for test preparation materials related to individual jobs or professions. Please keep in mind that these materials are not designed to prepare you for any one state employment examination.

Please note that this booklet does not include any example questions or suggestions on what to study for the test. This preparation guide is intended to provide you with some general guidance in preparing for and taking written tests. It is not meant to provide absolute procedures that will apply to all situations and to all applicants. It is suggested that you read the information in this guide carefully and incorporate this with any test taking strategies that you have found to be successful in the past.

MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS

A multiple-choice question is usually designed in one of three forms: (1) it states a question for you to answer, (2) it asks you to choose the correct answer from a list of statements, or (3) it asks you to complete an incomplete statement. For each question, several possible answer choices will be listed. You are to select the one choice that best answers the question, is most nearly correct or best completes the statement. Your score on the multiple-choice test will be based on the total number of questions that you answer correctly. Therefore, it is to your advantage to record an answer for every question, even if you are not sure which is the correct answer. However, be sure that you mark only one answer for each question; if you mark more than one answer, that question will be recorded as incorrect.

Tips on Answering Multiple-Choice Questions:

- 1) The test booklet will indicate if the multiple-choice questions are of equal value or if the questions are weighted differently. In a test with differently weighted questions, the weights (point values) for the questions will be presented in the test outline. Refer to the test outline to identify the questions in the test that have the highest weight. If you may not have time to answer all of the questions in the test, you should make sure that you answer the questions with the highest weight before you answer other questions.
- 2) Read the entire question carefully and try to answer it without referring to the answer choices. This way, you may be less confused than if you read the possible answer choices first. If the question does not seem to provide sufficient information about what is being asked, or if the question requires that you choose the answer that best completes a statement, read over the alternatives first to see what answers are offered and which can be eliminated.
- 3) Look for any key words in the question that may help you select the correct answer from among the choices. Some common key words are: some, none, many, most, all, least, less, more, worst, poor, good, best, advantage, disadvantage, smallest, smaller, larger, largest, first, last, never, always, any, only, usually, seldom, frequently, generally, often, not, except, false and true.
- 4) Always read all of the possible answer alternatives carefully before jumping to the conclusion that a particular one must be the best.
- 5) Use the process of elimination if the correct answer does not immediately occur to you. Eliminate obviously wrong answers and narrow your choice to the ones that directly answer the question. Then select the answer that most exactly answers the question.
- 6) Don't be influenced by the length of the answer choices. The longest answer is not necessarily the correct one.

- 7) Don't select an answer choice just because it includes technical language. Answer choices using technical terminology may be included in order to see whether you know the difference between what "looks right" and what "is right".
- 8) The following clues may help you select the correct answer:
 - a) Use key words in the question to eliminate obviously wrong answer choices.
 - b) Be alert to the presence of negative words in the question stem. Negative words (such as not, except, never, least place limitations on an answer and may make an answer choice incorrect.
 - c) Be alert to the presence of hedging words in the question stem. Hedging words (such words as probably, may, might, most likely, sometimes) reduce limitations on an answer and often make an answer choice more acceptable.
 - d) Try not to read too much into the question. Avoid imagining detailed scenarios in which the answer could be true. In most cases, questions that appear to be "trick questions" are usually only tricky because they're not taken at face value. Determine the best answer using only the information supplied in the question, without making unwarranted assumptions. The correct answer is the one that works best for the situation described.
 - e) If more than one choice seems to answer the question correctly, see if one of the answer choices is "all of the above". Since there can only be one right answer, if two answers seem to be equally correct then the right answer may be "all of the above".
 - f) Be sure to choose an answer that is directly related to the question being asked. Do not select an answer choice even if it is a true or correct statement by itself, unless it specifically answers the question being asked.
 - g) Some multiple-choice questions ask how you would handle a situation that may happen on the job. Answer the question as if you were the employee responsible for handling the situation. Use your judgment when choosing the answer that you feel would work best on the job.
 - h) The correct answer is the choice that contains the most exact or most complete information in response to the question. Some answer choices may be correct or true in part, but less exact or less complete than the "best" choice. An answer choice that is only partially correct, partially true or true only under certain conditions should be considered an incorrect choice.
- 9) Don't skip around. Skipping around in the test wastes time since you will have to spend time searching for the skipped questions later. A better approach is to try your best to answer each question in order. If you cannot decide on an answer to a question in a minute or two, mark the answer you believe to be the most correct on your answer sheet, record the number of the question somewhere in the test booklet (or on the scratch paper that was provided to you), and go on to the next question. You can come back to these questions later if you have time.
- 10) Generally, first answer choices are more often correct than not. There is evidence to suggest that test-takers more frequently change right answers to wrong ones than wrong answers to right ones. Don't race through the questions. If you take time to think through each question, your initial answer will usually be the correct one. Although there are always exceptions to this rule, the best approach is to carefully answer each question the first time you go through the test and change only those answers that are clearly incorrect if you have time later.

- 11) Don't let more difficult questions affect your attitude and steal valuable time. Don't linger over questions you cannot answer. If you cannot decide on an answer choice, make your best guess and move on. However, if you must guess, try to eliminate as many clearly wrong choices as you can in order to make your guess from as few alternatives as possible. If there are four answer choices from which to choose, your chances of guessing the correct answer are one in four, or 25%. If you can eliminate even one answer choice, your chances of guessing correctly rise to one in three, or 33%. Elimination of additional answer choices further increases your chances of guessing the correct answer.

- 12) Rely on your knowledge and don't look for patterns. Choosing answer "C" for 3 questions in succession is not a good reason to avoid answer "C" for the next question. It is best to trust only your knowledge in answering the questions.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

There are two types of essay questions that may be used in a written test: (1) the Content Essay Question and (2) the Writing task question.

Content Essay Questions. In a content essay question you are given (a) a brief description of a situation or issue and (b) a question for you to respond to. The situation or issue will be one that a newly appointed worker might be expected to encounter or handle in his/her new job. You may also be given some simulated work documents and asked to answer one or more questions concerning the problem situation or issue that is presented. The specific question may be one or more of the following types of questions: (1) describe the steps you would take to properly handle the situation or issue, (2) list the problems or mistakes you find in the simulated work documents and/or the actions you would take in response to the documents, (3) indicate whether the action taken by subordinate workers in the situation was proper or improper and explain why. Content essay questions are usually graded only on the content of the response (the amount of correct and complete information provided in the response) and not on written communication skills. However, candidates' responses on content essay questions can also be evaluated on writing skills in addition to content. And, depending on the question, there may be cases where the order of the information included in the response will be considered in the scoring of the question. The instructions for the essay question will clearly describe what your response will be graded on.

Writing Task Questions. In a writing task question you are given a brief description of some situation or issue, and often some simulated documentation, to which a newly appointed worker would be expected to prepare a written response. You may be asked to write a response letter or memorandum, or to prepare a brief summary or narrative. For this type of essay question, candidates are often graded only on their written communication skills and not directly on the content of the letter or summary. However, candidates' responses on writing task questions can also be evaluated on content in addition to writing skills. The instructions for a writing task question will clearly describe what form your response should be in and what dimensions your response will be graded on.

Tips on Answering Essay questions

- 1) If more than one essay question is included in the test, refer to the test outline in the test booklet to identify the questions that have the highest point value. Then quickly read through all of the questions to evaluate their difficulty. Make short notes of any pertinent ideas that occur to you as you read them but don't spend a lot of time writing at this point. It is more important for you to first determine the amount of time you will spend on each question based on its difficulty and value. This will help you avoid spending too much time on any one question, especially those that have a low value.
- 2) Start with the easiest question. Beginning to work by choosing something you can handle is the best way to reduce test anxiety.

- 3) Answer the questions that are worth the most points first. If you begin to run out of time and have to rush through your answer, it would be best if the question is not worth too much.
- 4) Even though you may feel that you should tackle the most difficult essay questions first, you should avoid doing so. Often, a test-taker who answers the more difficult questions first will not leave enough time to completely answer other questions that would easily have earned points. If you encounter a question that you think you cannot answer, leave it for last. By the time you get back to it you may have come up with some ideas.
- 5) Read each essay question and any instructions carefully and completely. Look for specific detailed directions on how to proceed. As you read the instructions for a question, underline or circle key words that identify exactly what information you are to provide in your answer and the format in which you are required to present your response. Also write down any thoughts, words or ideas that immediately come to mind that may help you address the subject of the essay and help you organize your answer.
- 6) Some key verbs that are often found in instructions for essay questions and which are used to identify the format in which you should respond are listed below:
 - a) Compare - emphasize similarities but also present differences.
 - b) Contrast - give differences only.
 - c) Evaluate or Critique - give your opinion of both the values and limitations of the situation supported by evidence.
 - d) Define – provide meaning or purpose but with no details.
 - e) Discuss – present detailed reasons, both pro and con.
 - f) Explain - give reasons for happenings or situations.
 - g) Identify - list and describe.
 - h) Summarize - give main points from beginning to end of event.
 - i) Solve - come up with a solution based on given facts or your knowledge.
- 7) Before you start writing, identify the pieces of information you want to include in your answer and the order in which you will present it. Review the key words and any notes you have made specifically addressing the information asked for in the question. Prepare a brief, logical outline of your response to insure that it is well organized and that you have not carelessly overlooked any important information. This need not be a detailed outline but simply a list of words or phrases which will help to remind you of the important points you want to include in your answer. You will be provided with space in the test booklet (or with scratch paper) for you to use for this purpose.
- 8) Try not to read too much into the essay questions. Determine the best response using only the information supplied in the question, without making unwarranted assumptions. The correct answer is the one that addresses the situation or problem as described.

- 9) Be detailed, but concise. Provide all of the information requested in the specific question. Answer each question thoroughly, concentrating details on the specifics asked in the question, but without going off into irrelevant topics or providing an excess of unnecessary detail.
- 10) Don't ignore any part of a question. Pay careful attention to questions that have more than one part for you to address. Respond to each of the parts separately in your response.
- 11) Don't skip over an important point or step because you assume that the graders must already know it. In order for the graders to give you credit for knowledge of the subject, you must thoroughly present and explain it in your answer. Many candidates lose points by giving short or incomplete answers. Most essay questions that present a problem for you to solve or a situation for you to handle will require that you address several steps in the solution. It is your task to provide enough sufficient and relevant information to convince the raters to determine that you are qualified to perform the job.
- 12) If the question poses a problem you must solve, analyze the problem thoroughly. Clearly explain how you would investigate the problem and how and why you came to the conclusions you reached. Describe the things you considered and how this led to your conclusions. Describe and explain what you would do, why you would do it, and what results you would expect.
- 13) Watch for special words or phrases that give you information about the situation and your role in it. For example: "You are a new supervisor..."; "Your supervisor is gone for today and you are in charge..."; "What would be most important for you to do first..."; etc. Use this information to identify the level of authority you would have in the situation and what you think you would be expected to do.
- 14) If you are responding to a writing task question, make certain you write your response in the format required. Most applicants find it beneficial to draft their response first on scratch paper or to at least make a very detailed outline before writing their final response. Make certain your response is clear and well organized. Good paragraph and sentence structure as well as proper English grammar and punctuation are critical in a writing task question.
- 15) Make certain your final responses are written on the appropriate pages in the answer booklet provided for the essay questions. If you make notes or write out a draft response in the test booklet, make certain you leave yourself enough time to write your complete responses in the answer booklet.
- 16) Write your answers legibly. If you can do so, print your answers so that they can be read easily and clearly understood by the graders.

GENERAL TIPS FOR MAKING THE BEST USE OF TEST TIME

1. The test instructions will tell you how much time you will have to complete the entire written test. Although every effort is made to ensure that applicants have sufficient time to read, absorb and answer each question, it is still important for you to keep track of the time so that you will complete the entire test within the allotted time.
2. You will be told how much time you have to complete the test before the test starts. Typically, candidates are given about 1.5 minutes to read and answer each multiple-choice question and 20 to 45 minutes to read and answer each essay question. If you find that you are taking too much time, try to read and answer the questions a little more quickly.
3. Try not to spend too much time on difficult multiple-choice questions. Instead, choose what you think is the best answer as quickly as you can, and come back to the question later if you have time. If you skip a multiple-choice question, be sure that you also skip the corresponding number on the answer sheet. Check often to be sure that you have not lost your place and that you are marking the correct answer bubble on your answer sheet.
4. If the written test includes one or more essay questions, make sure that you plan your time to answer these. Try to allocate more time to the essay questions that are worth the most
5. Leave yourself a few minutes at the end to go over your paperwork. Make sure you have answered all of the questions and that your responses are clearly marked.

ON THE DAY OF THE TEST

1. Arrive at the testing location early enough so that you can (try to) get relaxed before the start of the test. But don't arrive so early that you have time to become anxious.
2. Do not bring family or friends to the examination site. Space is arranged only for applicants and the monitoring staff.
3. You are not permitted to bring books, manuals, notes or pads into the test room. Calculators and watches with memory capability, electronic paging devices, recording or filming devices, radios, computers, cellular phones, and other mechanical and electronic devices are not permitted in the test room.
4. Be sure to bring two sharpened No. 2 pencils with you.
5. Be sure to read and follow the instructions given in your scheduling letter about what you need to bring to the test site. If you should bring any additional materials with you, such as a calculator, a pen, etc., this will be mentioned in your scheduling letter.
6. Be sure to bring your scheduling letter and a photo ID that includes your signature with you.

IN CONCLUSION: SOME COMMON SENSE SUGGESTIONS

It is important to use common sense when facing a written test.

- Get plenty of sleep the night before and be sure to dress comfortably and eat breakfast.
- If you are not sure where the test site is, take a drive to the site before the test date.
- Leave yourself plenty of time to get to the test site just in case there is traffic or you have car problems.

Keep in mind that the Department of Administrative Services wants you to succeed when taking state examinations. We do not utilize “trick” questions, tolerate biased grading or develop examinations that favor a particular racial, ethnic or gender group.

The intent of our examinations is to identify the best qualified candidates for state positions based on the knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to perform the duties of the job.

Best of luck!